

# Language-in-Education Policy and Assessment in Japan: Teachers' Beliefs and Implementation – A Review of the Literature

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Teacher beliefs are defined as “a form of personal knowledge consisting of implicit assumptions about students, learning, classrooms and the subject matter to be taught” (Kagan, 1992, as cited in Borg, 2015, p. 41). Teacher beliefs, therefore, influence teaching and classroom practices (Borg, 2015). By understanding English as a foreign language (hereafter EFL) teachers' beliefs towards both assessment and the *Course of Study* (curriculum guidelines), it is then possible to comprehend how teachers interpret language-in-education policies, which in turn will shed light on how EFL teachers enact the language-in-education policy in Japanese senior high schools.

This paper examines EFL teachers' (native and non-native<sup>1</sup>) assessment practices in senior high schools in Japan in regards to the 2009 *Course of Study* revision, as well as their beliefs towards assessment and the *Teaching English in English* initiative. It specifically explores the literature in three areas of concern: (1) language teacher cognition and teacher agency when implementing policy; (2) language assessment and language teachers' assessment practices; and (3) teaching EFL in Japan, particularly language-in-education policy enactment.

## 1. Enacting Language Policy

This section will examine the literature on the relationship between language policy and planning (hereafter LPP) and teacher cognition; specifically, the agency EFL teachers have in policy enactment. Section 1.1 focuses on how language-in-education policy at the macro-level can affect classroom practices positively and negatively. The macro-level consists of government agencies, which make decisions about language-in-education policy, specifically policy texts and guidelines (Liddicoat, 2014). Subsequently, Section 1.2 concentrates on teacher agency and teachers' cognition when implementing language-in-education policy. This sub-section is to demonstrate the importance of the teachers' role in interpreting and implementing language-in-education policies.

### 1.1 Language Policy and Planning

Research in the field of language policy and planning has focused on both *macro-language planning* (e.g. Fishman, 1979; Haugen, 1983) and *micro-language planning* (e.g. Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2014). “Macro-level language policies are language policies that are created outside the context in which the language policy is interpreted and appropriated,” whereas “micro-level policies are language policies created within the context in which they are interpreted and appropriated” (Johnson, 2013, p. 191). Macro-policies are typically set up by national or state-level governing bodies, while micro-policies are devised by individuals or even institutions, which are intended to benefit their students (Johnson, 2013).

Language-in-education (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997) also known as acquisition planning (Cooper, 1989) or language education policy (Shohamy, 2006), focuses on the language(s) used in education, for example, as a medium of instruction and/or the instruction of foreign languages. Language-in-education policies, more specifically macro-level policies can be divided into different focal areas or sub-policies (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2005):

- Access policy (Who learns what when?);
- Personnel policy (Where do teachers come from and how are they trained?);
- Curriculum policy (What is the objective in language teaching/learning?);
- Methodology & materials policy (What methodology and what materials are employed over what duration?);
- Resourcing policy (How is everything paid for?);
- Community policy (Who is consulted/involved?);
- Evaluation policy (What's the connection between assessment on the one hand and methods and materials that define the educational objectives on the other?) (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2005, p. 1014).

The coherency between the sub-policies/sub-dimensions, such as curriculum policy and methodology & materials policy and assessment policy, is paramount in regards to classroom practice. Teaching methodology is a concern when implementing language-in-education policies especially when *curriculum policy*, *materials policy*, and *evaluation policy* are unaligned (Liddicoat, 2004). Moreover, “congruity between these sub-dimensions may become problematic if explicit policy recommendations result in practices that implicitly promote the methodology meant to be replaced” (Glasgow, 2014, p. 153). One example is the shift of language policies and language syllabi since the 1990s towards different forms of Communicative Language Teaching (hereafter CLT), particularly in countries where English is taught as a foreign language. Furthermore, English language teaching in Asia has been scrutinized for failing to improve learners' communicative competence due to the use of the accustomed grammar-translation and audio-lingual language teaching methodologies (Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 2007). Therefore, the promotion of CLT, task-based language teaching (hereafter TBLT)<sup>2</sup> and conducting English language classes in English, in language-in-education policies is seen in polities in East Asia, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and China.

In countries with centralized education systems, such as China, Japan, and South Korea, incongruent sub-policies, unaligned sub-policies, can be seen. Liddicoat (2004) further argues that language-in-education policies can both implicitly and explicitly influence teaching methodologies. “Policies regarding language learning materials have a direct, and reciprocal, impact on questions of methods, hence the close bracketing of these in Kaplan and Baldauf’s typology. There is also a strong direct impact of curriculum policy, and especially assessment, on language teaching method” (Liddicoat, 2004, p. 156). One example is a conflicting methods and materials policy focusing on grammar-translation exercises with a curriculum policy emphasizing communicative abilities. The following inspects the conflicts between sub-policies at the macro-level within language-in-education policies in China and South Korea, as there are similarities between their education and that of Japan.

China has gone through an extensive overhaul of their English language program since 2000 (Liddicoat, 2004). The national curriculum from this time has focused on the development of the four micro skills to improve students’ communicative competence as well as the promotion of CLT as the primary language teaching methodology (Hu, 2002). Nevertheless, enacting the curriculum policy with the intended methods policy (CLT) has been difficult due to contradictions in the materials policy and assessment policy, since the textbooks tended to be oriented towards the grammar-translation method and not a CLT approach (Liddicoat, 2004), together with the National Matriculation English Test which assesses students’ linguistic knowledge through grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, and writing but not communicative competency (Cheng & Qi, 2006). Moreover, Cheng (2008) argues that examinations are extremely influential in decision-making in Chinese society and as a consequence to China’s history of testing, the primary goal of teaching is guided to ensure students pass the exam, so secondary school English teachers tend to concentrate on what is needed to do well on the entrance exam (Cheng, 2008). Furthermore, as Sun, Hu, and Ng (2016) argue, English language teaching reform should emphasize the change of assessment methods, which in turn would create more congruency between the materials, methods, and assessment policies, making it possible to achieve curriculum objectives.

Comparable to China, South Korea has a long history of testing since the Chosun Dynasty (1392-1897). The Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test (KSAT) has had considerable influence on education in general as well as English language teaching. Even though the National Curriculum calls for an integrative communicative approach to English language teaching and learning, teachers tend to prepare students for the KSAT by focusing strategies for the test since the English section of the KSAT does not include a speaking or writing component (Choi, 2008). The South Korean government has encouraged teachers to use teacher-based assessment (Butler, 2009), and includes interviews, portfolio assessment, classroom observation, as well as self- and peer-assessment when evaluating students’ performance. However, teachers have found it difficult to implement using teacher-based assessment, as the government has not provided adequate guidance in training or guidelines (Butler & Lee, 2005 as cited in Butler, 2009). Current researchers have examined teacher-based assessment, however, there are few studies regarding how teachers think and conduct assessment, especially in EFL in the Japanese context.

This section explored language-in-education policy at the macro-level. Contradictions and the (in)

coherence of sub-policies (i.e. methods and materials policy; evaluation policy; curriculum policy) make language-in-education policy enactment difficult. Nonetheless, teachers are central to the implementation process. The forthcoming section (1.2) will examine language-in-education from a bottom-up or micro-level language policy standpoint, more explicitly, language teacher cognition and teachers' agency in policy implementation.

### *1.2 Teacher Cognition and Agency in Language Policy Enactment*

Language teacher cognition (hereafter LTC), as defined by Borg (2003), is the beliefs and knowledge of teachers and what they think. LTC further consists of the relationships between *schooling*, *professional coursework*, *contextual factors*, and *classroom practices* (Borg, 2003). Therefore, teachers' pedagogical principles and decisions together with the actions that teachers make in the classroom are rooted in the teachers' experience as a learner, by the training they have received during teacher education, from other teachers at their institution, and in their actual classroom experience (Borg, 2003; 2015). Furthermore, LTC is a crucial component of the policy implementation process, since teachers need to comprehend and make sense of the language policy while adjusting their teaching ideology and mindset towards the policy (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002).

Before implementing language policy and curriculum designed by others, teachers think and reflect about the curriculum and language policy first. Furthermore, teachers' decision-making process happens both before and during teaching and thus results in teacher agency in the classroom (Borg, 2009). Policy understanding and making sense of it by the implementing agent (the teacher) is essential when enacting educational policies including language-in-education policies. In addition to teacher cognition, teacher agency further contributes to language-in-education policy implementation. Priestly, Biesta, and Robinson (2013) proclaim that,

while agency can be defined as the way in which actors 'critically shape their responses to problematic situations' (Biesta & Tedder, 2006, p. 11), it is important not to see agency as a capacity residing in individuals, but rather to conceive of it as something that is achieved through the engagement with very specific contextual situations.

(Priestly et al., 2013, p. 188)

In essence, teacher agency refers to how teachers respond critically and analytically to language-in-education policies in certain contextual settings. Furthermore, Johnson (2009) acknowledges "human agency is central because teachers are positioned as individuals who both appropriate and reconstruct the resources that have been developed and made available to them" (p. 13). I view teacher agency as part of language teacher cognition since teachers exert agency in certain contexts. Teachers' beliefs and knowledge are also made up by the context the teacher is in as well as the context of their education.

Since the mid-1990s, research on language-in-education policies has shifted from *macro planning* to *micro planning*, where the teacher as the implementer is seen as the center of an "onion" (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Menken and García (2010) add, "educators are at the center of this dynamic

process, acting on their agency to change various language education policies they must translate into practice” (p. 1), making *de facto* policies. In other words, *de facto* language-in-education policies are obtained through teachers’ classroom practices and are not clearly stated in language policy documents (Shohamy, 2007). In addition to teachers being at the center of policy implementation, “educators always seem to negotiate the language education policies they enact in their schools, even in countries where the ideological and implemental spaces for resistance or change are small” (Menken & García, 2010, p. 4). Moreover, as Ngyuen and Bui (2016) indicate, “the notion of agency opens a new perspective in further understanding the interplay between top-down policy and bottom-up policy practice in specific settings institutional settings” (p. 89). Teachers are not passive policy implementers but rely on their cognition when implementing language-in-education policy.

Several studies examine teacher agency in centralized educational systems in various Asian contexts, including Brunei (Martin, 2005a), China (Yang, 2015), Malaysia (Martin, 2005b), South Korea (Choi, 2014), Vietnam (Nguyen & Bui, 2016), as well as Japan (Glasgow, 2016). As language policies in countries with systematized educational systems tend to be top-down, these studies are integral in demonstrating the teachers’ role in language-in-education policy implementation. In addition to studies on teacher agency and language policy implementation, there are numerous studies on language teacher cognition and classroom practice: for example, implementing and understanding teaching methodology (Ahn, 2011; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004; Woods & Cakir, 2011); understanding curriculum reform (Fang & Garland, 2014; Kim, 2011; Zhang & Liu, 2014); and teacher beliefs and language policy implementation (Farrell & Kun, 2007; Hawanti, 2014; Stritikus, 2003). The following studies are concerned with teacher cognition, implementing curriculum, and policy changes, which is a central theme in this study.

During a 15-month ethnographic study, Fang and Garland (2014) investigated how Chinese teachers of English implemented a new English curriculum in Chinese secondary schools between 2007 and 2010. Fang and Garland observed various constraints influencing the teachers’ implementation of the English language curriculum in their classrooms. These constraints included assessment, the creation of communicative activities, the teachers’ communicative ability as well as classroom management. The teachers in the Fang and Garland (2014) study claimed that the National University Entrance Exam to be a major obstacle in enacting the more communicative-oriented curriculum since the contents of the National University Entrance Exam focuses on grammatical competence as opposed to communicative competence as stipulated in the curriculum. Thus, teachers tended to ignore the communicative-oriented syllabi in favor of focusing their teaching on grammar and vocabulary for National University Entrance Examination. In addition to the National University Entrance Exam, the high-stakes school-based language exams also lacked communicative features resembling characteristics in the national curriculum. Furthermore, teachers’ knowledge of English language teaching methods including CLT and TBLT hindered classroom innovation, mainly due to the limited training opportunities regarding implanting the national English curriculum. In turn, teachers that do not have the opportunity to attend a training session, put emphasis on teaching towards the National University Entrance Exam. Therefore, assessment policies, including *de facto* policies, have a strong influence on language teacher cognition, which in turn affects the teachers’

sense of agency.

An examination of how language policy is transformed into classroom practices was investigated by Stritikus (2003) through observation and interviews of a bilingual teacher of English language learners in response to Proposition 227 in California, a policy to terminate bilingual education and to increase the teaching of English. Stritikus reported that the teacher's action to policy reform was effected by her own education, educational values, and work context. The teacher's identity is essential to how language policy revisions are processed. Furthermore, Stritikus argues that how teachers respond to language policy reform including curriculum initiatives is associated with sociocultural factors including teaching context, teaching ideologies, and personal ideals.

In another study analyzing teacher beliefs and language policy, Farrell and Kun (2009) conducted a case study that explored three Singaporean primary school teachers' views of language policy and how these teachers executed the policy in their classrooms. Similar to Stritikus (2003), the findings show that implementing language policy is a complex procedure. Consequently, teachers exert agency and make decisions on classroom practices.

The relationship between teacher cognition and agency are imperative when enacting language-in-education policy. The previously mentioned studies (e.g. Fang & Garland, 2014; Farrell & Kun, 2003; Stritikus, 2003) provide further evidence of teachers' knowledge and beliefs on classroom practices and towards executing language learning initiatives. The subsequent section will examine issues of assessment in language teaching and learning.

## 2. Assessment in Language Teaching and Learning

Assessment is a crucial area of research, policy, and application in English language teaching (Cheng, Rodgers, & Wang, 2008; Kunnan, 2005), as well as an integral part in language-in-education policy, giving it an extremely important role in society (Shohamy, 2007). Moreover, language teaching methodology and curriculum can be directly affected by language assessment (East, 2008; Shohamy, 2007). Large-scale language tests are used as gatekeepers of education for non-native English speakers to enter universities in English speaking countries such as the United States (TOEFL), Canada (TOEFL/IELTS), United Kingdom (IELTS), and Australia (IELTS), as well as the English sections of university entrance exams in China, South Korea, and Japan, as well as exams promoting English language-in-education policy as seen in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Certificate of Education) and in China (National Matriculation English Test and College English Test). Moreover, stakeholders including teachers, students, parents, institutions, and government practices can be influenced by tests (Shohamy, 2001, 2007; McNamara & Roever, 2006).

Hamp-Lyons (2007) refers to the two different assessment cultures – *classroom-based assessment* culture and *large-scale* testing culture. Assessment culture in an institution and even the country can dictate teachers' assessment practices and procedures by the types of items on exams and types of evaluation either classroom-based assessment and/or large-scale testing. Carless (2011) more distantly describes these two cultures as *examination-oriented assessment culture* and *learning-orientated assessment culture*. Confucian-heritage countries (China, South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan) are typically *examination-*

*orientated*, where exams tend to be summative in nature (Carless, 2011).

A further issue regarding language testing is washback or backwash, which is the effect of tests on teaching and learning (Cheng & Curtis, 2004). Washback is the concept in which tests and/or examinations influence classroom instruction (Cheng & Curtis, 2004). Consequently, washback can have both positive and negative effects on language teaching and learning (e.g. Andrews, 2004). When tests possess a high position within the education system, the tests potentially dictate the curriculum and thus creating *de facto* language-in-education policies (Menken, 2008b). Furthermore, regardless of what curriculum policy statements declare, high-stake examinations dictate what is being taught in school, which in turn creates a new curriculum or *de facto* language-in-education policy. As previously mentioned, examples of tests becoming a *de facto* language policy can be seen in China with the National College Entrance Exam (Hu, 2002), as well as the National Matriculation English Test and the College English Test (Cheng, 2008); in South Korea with the Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test (Choi, 2008); in Japan with the National Center University Entrance Exam (Sasaki, 2008); in Israel with the EFL Oral Matriculation Test (Ferman, 2004); and in the United States with English Language Learners and the assessment policy for the *No Child Left Behind*<sup>3</sup> educational act (Menken, 2008a, 2011). As teachers want their students to perform well on the test, teachers change the intended curriculum and teach towards the exam (Choi, 2008; Hu, 2002; Sasaki, 2008). Tests are, therefore, tools that can impact a curriculum both positively and negatively (Shohamy, 2007).

## 2.2 ESL/EFL Teachers' Language Assessment Practices

The functions of assessment are essential and imperative for learning in both ESL and EFL contexts (Davison & Cummins, 2007; Kunnan, 2005). Still, assessment practices in ESL/EFL classrooms are complicated (Cheng, Rogers, & Hu, 2004; Rea-Dickens, 2007), and teachers are an integral part of the delivery of assessment and curriculum innovation as implementers of policy (Fullan, 2004). Rea-Dickens (2004) indicates the teachers' position in utilizing assessment for learning is essential. Furthermore, as Purpura (2004) recommends language assessors (including language teachers) be knowledgeable of language learning, teaching, and assessment theories and methodologies.

Teachers' assessment literacy also affects teachers' evaluation of students learning outcomes. Assessment literacy is the knowledge of assessment issues by language teachers (Taylor, 2009). More specifically, it is the understanding of creating, conducting, and analyzing language exams. Therefore, teachers who understand the use of assessment can turn curricular objectives into reality. Curriculum policies, as well as teachers' beliefs and experience, can impact teachers' practice in the classroom (Murphy, 2006). Extensive literature exists in the area of high-stakes testing with regards to classroom practice. CBA in English language learning has more recently been researched since 2004, however, CBA in Japanese senior high schools has not been widely researched. A review of studies on language teachers'

3 “No Child Left Behind is current federal education policy, and mandates the assessment of ELLs in English proficiency and academic content. This law is believed to encourage English-only approaches, and differs from previous education laws for its emphasis on outcomes and accountability” (Menken, 2008a, p. 35).



beliefs and practices of assessment (Cheng et al., 2004; Davison, 2004; Gu, 2014; Malakolunthu & Hoon, 2010) contribute to this paper by providing evidence that beliefs and assessment practices in various contexts including China and Hong Kong since these countries have similar educational systems (Carless, 2011), as well as Malaysia, Canada, and Australia.

Examining assessment practices and its relation to classroom practices, Gu (2014) analyzed how the curriculum is interpreted, made sense of, and then put into practice, in both instruction and evaluation in a senior high school in Beijing, China. Although the study examines the assessment practices of only one experienced teacher, the teacher mentioned her lack of confidence in creating original forms of assessments. Also, the teacher in the study and her colleagues were under the assumption that experts and not high school language teachers produced language assessments (Gu, 2014), which is also an issue in Japan (Kurihara, 2007). Moreover, types of assessment tasks used by the teacher were insufficient and limited to fixed-response (multiple choice) and fill-in-the-blank items. The teacher in Gu's study indicated that China's high-stakes university entrance exams dictate what the teacher teaches in the classroom and the kinds of assessment types used. In other words, macro-level assessment policies structurally influence and impact the assessment culture and practices of teachers at the ground level.

Similar to Gu (2014), Malakolunthu and Hoon (2010) examined teachers' viewpoints towards a new assessment policy for lower secondary schools in Malaysia, which included school-based assessment, in particular, the Oral English Assessment (OEA). The challenges that teachers faced when implementing the OEA, as well as the constraints for implementation, were of concern for Malakolunthu and Hoon. Results were comparable to Gu (2014) in respect that teachers lacked information about how to implement the OEA. Also, the teachers in Malakolunthu and Hoon's study were unclear about formative assessment, the process of helping students' language growth through feedback from language assessment and how to properly enact it in their classrooms.

Due to teachers' background and context, teachers view and practice assessment differently, so in a comparative study between the ESL and EFL contexts, Cheng, Rogers, and Hu (2004) investigated the assessment practices of 267 ESL/EFL teachers in Canada, Hong Kong, and Beijing at the tertiary level with the intention to comprehend how teachers assess and evaluate their students in the ESL and EFL classroom. The findings are based on the teachers' attitudes and perceptions of assessment through surveys. Interesting results were noted in the methods of assessing writing between the three contexts. First of all, the number of teachers using long essays to assess students' writing ability was greatly dissimilar, in that more than 50 percent of teachers in Canada and Hong Kong used them, but a mere 13 percent did in Beijing. On the other hand, the use of multiple-choice items for grammar was used more in Beijing than in Canada and Hong Kong. Secondly, student-centered assessment measures such as journal writing or portfolio were used much less in Beijing than in Canada. Thirdly, standardized writing tests, such as the College English Test, were used by 75 percent of the teachers in Beijing. Similar results with the methods of assessing listening were also noted. In the Chinese EFL context, standardized tests (i.e. College English Test) have significant influence on the practices of EFL teachers in universities.

In another comparative study, Davison (2004) explored assessment practices, beliefs, and attitudes



of Australian and Hong Kong secondary school English language teachers. In particular, this qualitative study used questionnaires, individual and group interviews and self-reports to examine the beliefs, attitudes and teachers' practice of assessment in two different contexts. The results of Davison's study provided a construct of a belief continuum, specifically showing the various approaches to assessment. Teachers from Australia favored more formative assessment procedures wanting to provide learners with ample feedback and growth for learning, whereas teachers from Hong Kong used summative assessment, therefore putting the teachers from Hong Kong on the opposite end of an assessment procedure continuum from their Australian counterparts.

A survey of 21 tertiary EFL teachers in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, by Troudi, Coombe, and Al-Hamly (2009) revealed that the assessment policies were determined by the schools' testing committees and/or supervisors. Furthermore, the teachers in the study noted that in some cases they did not know the contents of the course's midterm and final exams until the actual testing day. Thus, making the students actual performance an inaccurate view of the students' true proficiency. Moreover, this study observed a contrast between teachers' beliefs and philosophies with their teaching procedures.

Language teacher cognition, particularly teachers' beliefs of assessment, in addition to their knowledge or lack of knowledge of assessment directly impacts implementing government curriculum guidelines. Furthermore, teachers' own learner experience can also influence their choices regarding types of evaluation procedures and practices. Language teacher cognition may also filter how much information and what new details impact teachers' practice (Phipps & Borg, 2007). Therefore, teachers may be reluctant to pedagogical innovation and new curriculums when high-stakes examinations exist. By drawing on language teacher cognition and teacher agency, this study will shed light on how teachers negotiate their part in language-in-education policy enactment in Japan specifically concerning assessment practices in the English language classrooms in senior high schools.

### **3. Teaching of English as a Foreign Language in Japan**

This section examines the literature associated with English language education in Japan. Beginning with background of English education in Japan provides historical evidence, which is important in language policy studies since (Johnson, 2013, pp. 124-125). Section 3.1 provides context to English education initiatives and how these initiatives conform teachers' cognition and their implementation of language-in-education policies. By applying Kaplan and Baldauf's (2005) language policy and planning framework, Section 3.2 evaluates previous studies in regards to language-in-education policy enactment in the Japanese educational context.

### 3.1 English Education in Japan

Leading up to World War II and during the war, most Japanese viewed English negatively after all; it was the language of the enemy (Kitao & Kitao, 1995). Nevertheless, interest in English prospered during the Occupation period (1945-1952), in order to communicate with the American soldiers (Butler & Iino, 2005), as well as becoming a subject in 1947 *Course of Study*, the national curriculum guidelines (Butler & Iino, 2005; Sasaki, 2008). English was seen a valuable component for communication (Butler & Iino, 2005). Furthermore, English became part of the senior high school entrance exams in 1956, even though English was an elective course in junior high schools, which made English the primary foreign language taught in junior and senior high schools (Butler & Iino, 2005; Sasaki, 2008).

As Japan gained more international attention by hosting the 1964 Summer Olympics, the 1970 International Exposition, and its economic growth, the need for English communicative skills were paramount. Moreover, internationalization or *kokusaika* initiatives by Prime Minister Nakasone led to more prevalent revisions for English language courses in the 1989 *Course of Study* (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009; Yoshida, 2003). The major revisions in the Course or Study promoted the teaching and learning of communication skills through the classes: *Oral Communication A*, *Oral Communication B*, and *Oral Communication C*. Further revisions to the *Course of Study* were made again in 1999.

As a consequence, for the lack of communicative abilities in English of the Japanese people, MEXT administered the Action Plan “Japanese with English Abilities” in 2003. Japanese businesses strongly supported the Action Plan to raise communicative competence in order to conduct more business with foreign entities, which would help to reinvigorate the economy (Butler & Iino, 2005; Hashimoto, 2009; Okuno, 2007). In regards to English education, the Action Plan was to: improve teacher training and credentials for teaching EFL; promote curricular innovation and teaching practices at Super English High Schools, and decrease the practice of *yakudoku* and increase the use of English in the classroom (Butler & Iino, 2005).

Starting in 2002, one major program to improve English Language Teaching (ELT) in Japan was the designation of selected senior high schools around the country as Super English High Schools (SELHi), to investigate English teaching and learning practices (Honna & Takeshita, 2005; McKenzie, 2008). Teachers at the SELHi were given greater autonomy to enact communicative classrooms (Butler & Iino, 2005) by the selection of language program courses and textbooks (Noguchi, 2015). Furthermore, the SELHi program encouraged research for practical classroom use to foster advancements in English education (Honna & Takeshita, 2005). For example, the SELHi program schools researched language teaching methodologies, specifically teaching English courses as well as other courses in English (McKenzie, 2008), which lead to the *Teaching English in English* initiative inclusion in the 2009 *Course of Study* revision.

Objectives of the 2003 Action Plan, especially concerning the development of English communicative abilities, are apparent in the most recent revision of the *Course of Study* in 2009. One example of part of the Action Plan in the *Course of Study* is teaching EFL classes mainly in English, which has been in effect in private and public senior high schools throughout the Japan since April 2013. The 2009 *Course of Study* contains new classes intended for greater integration of multiple skills (MEXT, 2011), through English

*Communication I, II, III, English Expression I, II, and English Conversation. English Communication* incorporates all four skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), whereas the course *English Expression* incorporates both the productive skills (speaking and writing) (MEXT, 2011). Moreover, the *Course of Study* emphasizes the development of students' higher-order thinking skills in all subjects, not just English (MEXT, 2011). In the classes, English Expression I and English Expression II, students are expected to have discussions and debates on current world issues (MEXT, 2011). Also, one objective in English Expression I is the development of "speaking spontaneously and concisely" (MEXT, 2011). Nevertheless, the inclusion of spontaneous speaking in high schools could be problematic as teachers are not used to an active classroom of this nature. In addition to the newly created English courses, MEXT explicitly states in the 2009 *Course of Study* that English courses are to be instructed in English.

Since the end of World War II, English educational policies (i.e. *Course of Study*) have been revised multiple times. In more recent versions of the *Course of Study* (i.e. 1999 and 2009), there has been a focus on the development of students' communicative abilities. Nevertheless, problems such as textbooks, university entrance exams, and teacher training of teaching methodology are still prevalent, making implementation of the *Course of Study* problematic. The succeeding section (2.3.2) examines these problems of enacting language-in-education policy in Japan.

### 3.2 Implementing Language-in-Education Policy in Japan

Language-in-education policy enactment in Japan has been problematic due to various constraints including ministry-approved textbooks (McGroarty & Taguchi, 2005), university entrance examinations (Sasaki, 2008; Underwood, 2010; Watanabe, 2013), and the continuous use of the grammar-translation teaching methodology (Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Kikuchi & Browne, 2009), and a curriculum with difficult objectives that continues to focus on enhancing students' communicative abilities (Yoshida, 2009). Although, the Japanese Ministry of Education continues to make changes to English education, specifically in regards to curriculum reform by the introduction of multi-skilled English language courses and by teaching English in English. However, significant improvements to the Japanese students' English proficiency will be troublesome due to incongruent sub-policy goals as stated by Kaplan and Baldauf (2005), since educational policy objectives in Japan tend to be top-down emphasizing school entrance examinations (Hato, 2005, as cited in Noguchi, 2015). The following will highlight problems within the different sub-policies of language-in-education policy (materials; methods; curriculum; personnel; and assessment/evaluation) in Japanese senior high schools as this describes language policy and planning at the micro-level. Nonetheless, it is important to understand language policy and planning at the macro-level in Japan due to the country's highly centralized educational system. In addition to the macro-level policy, the micro-level is also of great importance since EFL teachers are the agents of language-in-education policy implementation.

*Materials.* Language learning materials including textbooks can have an integral role in supporting student learning of a foreign language. In many cases, the textbook can have a positive impact and influence learning. However, textbooks can also have negative consequences as well, in that the exercises

and activities might not effectively use the target language. In Japan, teachers must use MEXT-approved textbooks. However, both JTEs and ALTs have faced difficulties in effectively achieving the desired learning outcomes put forward by MEXT. One major constraint towards a communicative approach is the use of ministry-approved textbooks (Cook, 2010; Kikuchi & Browne, 2009; O'Donnell, 2005; Sakui, 2004; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004).

There are various studies on textbooks and the lack of communicative activities in them. In one study, McGroarty and Taguchi (2005) analyzed five ministry-approved textbooks for *Oral Communication A* (1989 *Course of Study*) in Japan. Specifically, they examined the textbooks to investigate the communicativeness of the activities, as well as the range of the situations and functions. The activities in the textbooks were primarily focused on grammar through mechanical practice such as fill-in-the-blank. As a result, activities did not allow students to express themselves creatively and permit students to practice their language independently from guided textbook conversations. Other textbook studies in Japan (Glasgow & Paller, 2014; Kobayakawa, 2011; Ogura, 2008) similarly found the activities in the MEXT-approved textbooks to predominately focus on grammar and vocabulary. Since activities were mostly fill-in-the-blank or other sentential level tasks (Glasgow & Paller, 2014; Kobayakawa, 2011; Ogura, 2008), the textbooks provided few chances for students to develop communication abilities as called for in the *Course of Study*.

*Methods.* The preferred methodology of English language teaching in Japan is grammar-translation, known as *yakudoku*. When the 1989 *Course of Study* called for enhancing students' communicative competence with the inclusion of the course, Oral Communication, there was a push for a more communicative teaching approach; thus, Communicative Language Teaching was to be used instead of *yakudoku* (Wada, 2002). Nevertheless, utilizing CLT in the classroom by JTEs has been troublesome. JTEs only incorporated communicative language activities in Oral Communication classes, when team-teaching with an ALT (Nishino, 2008; Sakui, 2004). The frequency of Oral Communication classes including communicative language activities ranged from a couple of times a week to once or twice a month. Three factors have limited effective CLT implementation in the EFL setting in Asian countries: (1) conceptual constraints, (2) classroom constraints, and (3) societal-institutional level restrictions (Butler, 2011, p. 39). Due to the lack of success with CLT and improving communicative competence, MEXT specified English classes to be taught in English as the medium of instruction in the 2009 *Course of Study* (MEXT, 2011). In a 2014 qualitative study, Glasgow (2014) examined three private school JTEs' perceptions and beliefs towards the new *Course of Study* and teaching method through interviews. Because of the ambiguity of the language in the *Course of Study*, the teachers have different interpretations and perceptions of "Teaching English in English," specifically concerning the amount of English and Japanese in the language classroom (Glasgow, 2014). Specific concerns among the teachers were in how to implement the "teaching English in English" initiative and prepare their students for the university entrance examinations. Thus, in regards to teachers' agency and cognition towards the policy, JTEs may ignore or even reject "teaching English in English" in their classrooms.

*Curriculum.* The *Course of Study* is revised approximately every ten years. In the 1989 *Course of Study* for foreign language education at both the junior high and senior high school levels for the first time

included the development of *communicative competence* (Wada, 2002). The 1989 curriculum guidelines emphasized the teaching of English as a means of communication, and thus, Communicative Language Teaching was stressed to replace the non-communicative methodology of *yakudoku* (Japanese form of teacher-led grammar-translation language teaching) (Sato, 2002) as well as Oral Communication becoming a required subject in senior high schools (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009). Through a survey of Japanese teachers of English, Wada (2002) discovered that both *Oral Communication A* and *Oral Communication B* were being taught, however, little to no teachers reported teaching *Oral Communication C*. Due to the extreme nature and the strong washback from the university entrance exams, even though only half of students go to university, teachers felt the need to focus their teaching on grammar and translation. Yoshida (2003) further states that *Oral Communication C* was indeed being taught, but not as intended in the *Course of Study* but as a supplementary class to develop grammatical competence for the university entrance examinations. Therefore, *Oral Communication C* became known as *Oral Communication G* - where G refers to grammar. Furthermore, Gorsuch (2000) examined how JTEs were implementing the national language-in-education policy in the 1989 *Course of Study*. The study surveys 884 public and private senior high school JTEs' perceptions and beliefs of CLT use in senior high schools. The findings show there is a connection between CLT approval and usage and the university entrance examinations, especially at highly academic senior high schools. Gorsuch concludes that if changes to the university entrance exams were made, teachers would change their practice to incorporate these changes. Clearly, this shows the great importance of the university entrance exams and its effects on education. Moreover, Kikuchi and Browne (2009) investigated the relationship between *Course of Study* guidelines and actual classroom practice from the viewpoint of the students. 112 college freshmen from three different private universities responded to a survey regarding the *Course of Study* guidelines within each class. First-year university students were selected because the researchers did not want to increase the stress and burden of high school students during their demanding preparation for their university entrance exams. Kikuchi and Browne revealed that high school language teachers were not meeting the objectives of the *Course of Study*, in that teachers put less emphasis on the development of students' communicative competence and more focus on preparing students for the entrance examinations.

*Personnel.* The majority of English language teachers in Japan are Japanese teachers of English (JTE), and they receive their teaching certificate as part of their undergraduate studies. In order to obtain a teaching certificate, they participate in a teaching practicum that can range between two and four weeks (Arimoto, 2004; Hawley & Hawley, 1997; Sato & Asanuma, 2000). Those that actually want to become teachers then must take an exam proctored by the prefectural boards of education or private institutions. The tests are in two parts: the written exam contains questions about education and subject area, and the oral exam in Japanese evaluates the candidate's personality as well as practical knowledge (Arimoto, 2004). However, these exams do not test the candidates' communication skills in English (Cook, 2010; Yonesaka, 1999). On the other hand, in order to promote foreign language education as well as international exchange at a local level, the JET Programme was introduced as a government sponsored program in 1987 to recruit Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) to assist in making EFL classrooms more communicative

(CLAIR, 2016). The primary purpose of the JET Programme was to increase and create opportunities for communication by having a native speaker in the classroom (Kaplan, Baldauf, & Kamwangamalu, 2011). However, compared with other NET schemes worldwide, teaching experience and/or professional training experience is not a required qualification for being a part of the JET Programme as an ALT (Lai, 1999). Many ALTs do not have TEFL/TESL experience and/or TESOL certificates or diplomas (Okuno, 2007). The ideal ALT candidate is not necessarily a competent teacher, but rather interested in sharing and exchanging cultures (Lai, 1999). Teaching positions for ALTs are limited to three years and in some cases, five years, thus showing that the Japanese government is not interested in nurturing and keeping competent language teachers but more interested in promoting international understanding (Lai, 1999).

*Assessment.* As many of the authors mentioned above (Glasgow, 2014; Gorsuch, 2000; Kikuchi & Browne, 2009) have noted, a major hurdle for implementing new and innovated language-in-education policies are the university entrance exams. Similar to the Chinese, South Korean and Taiwanese education system, the Japanese education system has a strong emphasis on knowledge-based examinations. The examination policy at the University of Tokyo was to assess the candidates' comprehensive scholastic ability and was enacted in 1875 for the institution's entrance exam (Amano, 1990). In 1877, the University of Tokyo was established and became one of the most prestigious universities, and thus, set the precedence for university entrance exams around the country (Amano, 1990). The university entrance exams became a competition where entry to a highly-ranked institution guaranteed a position in a prestigious company after graduation (Sasaki, 2008). The National Center University Entrance Exam and individual university entrance exams focused on translation, reading comprehension, grammatical items in addition to the pronunciation of written words (Sasaki, 2008). However, in order to make the National Center University Exam more aligned with the *Course of Study*, a listening component was added in 2006 as part of the Action Plan (Butler & Iino, 2004). Since then, the National Center University Exam has not changed, while the curriculum has changed to highlight both written and oral communication (MEXT, 2010). Furthermore, in a study investigating the teachers' beliefs and practice and teachers' relationships in a Japanese senior high school, Sato and Kleinsasser (2004) elude that English language teaching and learning is exam-orientated. Although some teachers in this study want to teach communication, they cannot ignore the university entrance exams. Consequently, teachers tended to focus on the exercises in the textbooks and other grammar-orientated activities. On the other hand, Underwood (2010) argues that the MEXT-approved textbooks provided inadequate reading comprehension items for the development of students' reading skills. Moreover, a majority of JTEs, in Kurihara's (2007) study, desired further professional development in the area of language testing. This further shows that EFL teachers in Japan, specifically JTEs, do not have adequate assessment literacy to carry out English language learning objectives stated by MEXT. Finally, the research centering on assessment in the Japanese education system has primarily been associated with the university entrance exams, as mentioned above. However, research in the assessment practices and beliefs of senior high school EFL teachers in Japan is scarce.



#### 4. Summary

This paper depicted how teacher agency and language teacher cognition can influence implementing language-in-education policy, assessment practices, procedures, and innovation. Language teachers are crucial in the language-in-education policy enactment process as either actively implementing the policy or resisting the policy, which in turn creates a *de facto* language-in-education policy. Depending on teachers' beliefs, teaching knowledge and experience, and teaching context, teachers make decisions exerting agency in the language classroom. Moreover, these classroom-based decisions may even contradict government policies, therefore resulting in the creation of *de facto* language-in-education policies.

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology continues to make changes to English education. However, problems with enacting language-in-education policy are prominent in the literature due to various constraints including ministry-approved textbooks, university entrance examinations, teachers' proficiency in English, and the continuous use of the grammar-translation teaching methodology. Although there is evidence that the grammar-translation method may not improve students' communicative competence, many JTEs continue to use it in their classrooms, due to pressures from the other Japanese teachers of English, since many JTEs learned English through grammar-translation in school. Nevertheless, many teachers want to incorporate a more communicative approach in their classrooms. However, teachers find teaching a more communicative syllabus difficult because of the university entrance examinations. Even though the university entrance exam is not the explicit assessment policy, it has created a *de facto* language-in-education policy due to its high-stakes nature. Furthermore, without more congruency between the sub-policies actual change to teaching practices and significant improvements will be troublesome. JTEs are at the center of the complex system for implementing and innovating the curriculum to meet the objectives set forth by MEXT in the *Course of Study*.

The assessment practices of EFL teachers in China, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Malaysia are known as mentioned in the previous studies, very little is known about the assessment practices of Japanese high school EFL teachers. Hence, there is the need to investigate teachers' assessment beliefs and practices. Moreover, the research on assessment in Japan has focused on the high-stakes university entrance exams, but not the assessment practices of teachers (a future focus of research). Finally, as DeCoker (2002) notes, "although the Japanese education has a rigid structure, a 'soft middle' level allows for modifications to take place in policymaking and implementation" (p. XVI). This 'soft middle' area is where EFL teachers' cognition and agency play the integral role in enacting MEXT's objectives for foreign language education in senior high schools.



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